DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 887 RC 021 441

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TITLE Teacher Education Partnerships at Valley High School.
PUB DATE 1998-03-00
NOTE 9p.; In: Coming Together: Preparing for Rural Special Education in the 21st Century. Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (18th, Charleston, SC, March 25-28, 1998); see RC 021 434.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; High Schools; Higher Education; Incentives; *Professional Development Schools; *Program Design; *Program Development; Rural Schools; Special Education; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS University of Northern Colorado

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the efforts of a university teacher preparation program working in collaboration with the faculty of a rural high school to provide a professional development model of preparing future teachers. The key elements of the partnership model are based on Goodlad's four functions of partner schools: preparing educators, providing professional development, conducting inquiry, and providing an exemplary education to all students. Valley High School (Colorado) is one of five partner high schools that have affiliated with the University of Northern Colorado's Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP). This paper describes the following aspects of STEP: (1) formation and development of the university-school partnership, including planning and state support; (2) program design in four phases, ranging from exploration of teaching and foundational issues to full-time student teaching; (3) expectations for competence in special education in each of the four phases; (4) incentives for partnership participation, such as funds for teacher or substitute teacher compensation, service to the partner school by teacher candidates, and professional development opportunities; and (5) present challenges and future opportunities related to needs for shared vision, strong leadership, balance of bottom-up and top-down support, ongoing program development, and accountability measures and systems. (SV)

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# TEACHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS AT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

## Introduction

The efficacious preparation of future teachers remains a topic of considerable interest and debate among teacher educators, teachers, school administrators, parents, and preservice teacher candidates alike. The traditional dichotomy between theory and practice in preparing future teachers has challenged teacher educators to identify more effective means of integrating wisdom from the world of practice and emerging best practices based on systematic research (Teitel, 1996). This paper identifies the efforts of a university teacher preparation program working in collaboration with the faculty of a rural high school to provide a professional development school model of preparing future teachers. The key elements of the partnership model are based on Goodlad's (1994) four functions of partner schools which include: preparing educators, providing professional development, conducting inquiry, and providing an exemplary education to p-12 students.

## Contextual Information

Valley High School is one of five partner high schools that have affiliated with the University of Northern Colorado's Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP). In addition to the STEP program, the University also offers teacher preparation programs at the elementary, middle school, and K-12 specialist levels which include partner school components. The content and structure of the teacher education programs varies by program level. This descriptive paper provides information on the following: identification of the process employed to form the partnership between the University and Valley High School; description of the program content including curriculum, program standards, performance assessment approaches and field experiences;

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delineation of the specific knowledge, performances, and dispositions expected of teacher candidates to meet the needs of exceptional students enrolled in the high school program; explication of the various incentives to the school for participation in the partnership; and, identification of present challenges and future opportunities to be addressed to sustain the partnership.

Valley High School is a comprehensive high school of approximately 600 students serving students in a rural western state. Thirty-five percent of the student body is Hispanic, while the majority of students is white, not of Hispanic origin. While serving a geographically diverse area of the state, the three largest towns from which students enroll at Valley encompass populations of 1783, 1084, and 1515 respectively. An elementary school serving grades K-5 is located in each of the three communities, and two middle schools serving grades 6-8 are located in the two communities north and south of the town which contains Valley High School. The major industries supporting the school district include agriculture and oil production. The public support for education in the school district is favorable as evidence by a successful $35 million bond referendum two years ago which renovated and expanded each of the district's six school buildings.

**Partnership Formation**

A long standing relationship existed between the University and Valley High School prior to the conceptualization of a professional development school model of preparing high school teachers. This relationship had consisted of regular placement of early field experiences and student teachers in a variety of disciplines such as mathematics, science, social science, foreign language, English, and special education.

One year prior to the implementation of the new STEP program model, teacher and administrative leaders were approached with a request from the University to pilot selected aspects of the new field based curriculum. Over the course of two semesters in school year 1995-96, teams of University faculty worked with small cohort groups of teacher candidates to field test the design of the new curriculum at Valley High School. During the course of this year, a number of planning and visioning meetings were conducted with representatives from both organizations to develop a shared vision for the future success of the partnership. In the first year of full scale implementation which took place in 1996-97, a variety of structural issues such as role definitions, supervisory responsibilities, planning processes, and incentives for participation were agreed upon. Support for these efforts were available through the participation of both organizations in the state's Partnership for Educational Renewal, one of the sixteen recognized settings in John Goodlad's (1994) National Network for Educational Renewal. The major priorities of the state's Partnership for Educational Renewal were: to support and increase the capacity of partner schools; to enhance the professional development

opportunities for school and university educators; and to support the cultivation of reflective inquiry at each partner school.

**Program Content**

Since receiving a state mandate in 1987, all teacher education candidates at the undergraduate level of collegiate study are required to complete a liberal arts major in a recognized discipline. Additional policy statements require all undergraduate programs of study to be completed within a time period of four calendar years or eight academic semesters. In response to this policy climate, the STEP curriculum provided one-third of the program requirements, general education coursework accounted for one-third of the program, and the liberal arts major constituted the remaining one-third. To achieve program coherence and integrity of outcomes, the STEP was organized around four program phases which included: (a) phase one, completed early in the sophomore year, with a focus on exploring teaching and a variety of foundational issues in education such as diversity/multicultural perspectives; (b) phase two, typically completed by candidates classified as late sophomores or early juniors, provided guided opportunities for interactions with students paired with in-depth content from special education and educational psychology; (c) phase three, which enrolled late juniors or early seniors, provided clinical experiences in concert with content from the disciplines of educational technology, content reading, and instructional methods; and, (d) phase four, at the end of the undergraduate experience, which comprised a full-time student teaching assignment.

Program standards based on the STEP knowledge base were identified in seven major categories including: diversity; assessment; knowledge of disciplinary content; the democratic ideal; knowledge of learning/pedagogy; communication; and professional behavior. Benchmarks of expected knowledge and performance on these seven dimensions were developed as statements of criteria for the four distinct phases of the program. The most significant innovation of the program design was the concentrated placement of teacher candidates and university professors at the school site. The partnership team of university faculty in the first two years of full implementation have been faculty from the disciplines of English and Special Education. By design, the partnership team at each partner school will represent one faculty member from the College of Arts and Sciences and one from the College of Education. Through frequent interactions with teacher candidates by means of observation, seminar, portfolio review and critique, and advisement, a coherent picture of the capabilities of teacher candidates was obtained very early in their program.

**Expectations for Competence in Special Education**

In phase one of the program, a foundational base of knowledge was expected of each teacher candidate on the dimensions of diversity and

multicultural perspectives. Students were expected to gain a broad exposure to the school culture during phase one through a variety of observational and small group instructional experiences. Throughout phase two, teacher candidates received an opportunity to concentrate on meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In addition to completing a three credit class on instructional modifications and adaptations for exceptional learners, each teacher candidate completed special education based assignments in a field based seminar and field experience combination at Valley High School. Phase three expected competence in instructional methods through concurrent completion of a discipline based teaching methods course in concert with a field based clinical experience which required a minimum of five supervised lessons from each cooperating teacher. The issues of student individualization were expected within a fifteen week, full-time student teaching placement held during the last semester of the teacher candidate's program.

**Incentives for Faculty Participation**

Effective partnerships typically have clear, mutual goals and the commitment of resources to sustain the partnership and its activities. McGowan (1990) identifies nine essential elements for effective collaboration which include: (a) adequate time for trust and cooperation to build; (b) perks or payoffs to support the development of the collaboration; (c) formalized administrative support from each represented organization; (d) a core group of committed individuals; (e) collegiality that encourages mutual respect and input from all participants; (f) a guiding mission and/or vision; (g) a model or a structuring process to focus efforts; (h) training since collaboration demands large quantities of cooperation, communication, and trust; and, (I) a sense of reality.

In recognition of the increased demands being placed on the host teachers at Valley High School, and responding to the different level of involvement of University faculty, a series of program based incentives were developed to support the partnership (Rude, 1998). One of the major facilitating factors which enhanced program success was the identification of two Site Coordinators drawn from volunteer faculty at the school. In recognition of the time invested by the Site Coordinators, a dollar amount equivalent to one day per week of substitute teacher salary compensation was provided to the school. The disposition of these dollars was determined by the school faculty, with the understanding that these resources could be used in any means which would enhance the partnership (e.g., stipends to Site Coordinators; equal amounts to each participating teacher; applied to professional development activities, etc.). In addition, a modest dollar amount was provided to the school for each teacher candidate completing a field based experience at the school site. Perhaps the most tangible incentive to the school was the provision of eight hours a service to the school on the part of each teacher candidate who was placed at Valley High School.

Additional partnership incentives that have been discussed will likely become more important in the near future. The provision of professional development events and activities holds great promise, as does the creation of systematic programs of inquiry that foster faculty in the role of teacher as researcher and or reflective practitioner (Schon, 1987). The ultimate purpose of the partnership, with an emphasis on simultaneous renewal of schooling and teacher preparation, is the enhanced capacity for the high school students to learn at higher levels of performance. This is critical with the increased expectations for students to attain higher standards of performance in today's schools (Sparks, 1997).

**Present Challenges and Future Opportunities**

As alluded to earlier, the theoretical base for the STEP is taken from Goodlad's (1994) national Network for Educational Renewal which emphasizes the simultaneous renewal of schools and teacher preparation programs. A major thrust of these efforts is to prepare and sustain professional educators who are thinkers, inquirers, and excellent teachers of all students. A substantial reliance on the work of Fullan (1994) and Hall & Hord (1986) has taken place in the process of implementing the program innovations. As with all significant innovations, the intended outcomes seek to make fundamental changes in the system which defines education for university teacher candidates and high school students alike. The impact of deep change (Quinn, 1996) provides significant changes in the roles of the professional educators at the school and university who are entrusted with the responsibility for creating improved outcomes for these groups.

Some of the more significant challenges to the future success of the partnership at Valley High School include the following: (a) shared vision, which encompasses the willingness to consider both strengths and weakness of the current system, articulation of desired changes, and the strategies for making the desired changes (Anderson, 1993); (b) strong leadership is essential to keep everyone focused on the vision and provide needed inspiration and encouragement (Quinn, 1996); (c) a balance of bottom-up and top-down support which is essential to avoid fragmentation and/or overload (Fullan, 1996); and, (d) structural support which encourages creative tension and the creation of advancing structures when the differences between actual and desired status of the partnership seems vast (Senge, 1990; Fritz, 1989).

Finally, the development of results oriented accountability measures and systems are being integrated into the program design. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (1995) advocates a model of balanced accountability that focuses on three dimensions including: (a) input and process accountability which insures equity in program construction; (b) accountability for student learning outcomes which insures learner

outcomes for high school students and university teacher candidates; and, (c) accountability for systems standards which guarantees program effectiveness. Data on these dimensions are presently being collected which will inform future program modifications and adjustments.

**Summary**

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future issued a report with five recommendations designed to improve the teaching and learning in today's schools. These five interlocking changes proposed by the Commission are as follows:

- Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers.
- Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.
- Overhaul teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom.
- Encourage and reward teaching knowledge and skill.
- Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success.

The Secondary Teacher Education Program was designed prior to this report being issued. It is interesting to note the overlap in the two developments. As a teacher preparation program that is based on standards and assessments, the first change is directly addressed. With the partner school model and philosophy, changes number two and five have high potential for success. With the ongoing commitment to working in partnership on the ideals of simultaneous renewal, teacher preparation and professional development will proceed hand in hand. The partnership has a strong potential to create schools which represent learning communities that promote successful stewards of educational excellence for all learners.

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